THE EPISTLE ON MARTYRDOM

Maimonides was born in April 1135 C.E. in Córdoba, a city which, like most of the Iberian peninsula at that time, was under Muslim rule. A few years later, Spain was invaded by a fundamentalist Muslim sect that had already seized power in Northwest Africa. This sect, the Almohads (*Al-Muwaḥḥidun:* those who assert the unity of God), adopted a policy of forced conversion to Islam. Many Jews were coerced into making a public affirmation that Muhammad was the prophet of God; others refused and suffered martyrdom. In order to survive, Maimonides' family wandered from place to place, reaching Fez in 1160 and going from there in 1165 to the Land of Israel and to Egypt, where they could again practice their faith openly.

One of the forced converts inquired of a rabbi—a distinguished talmudist—whether he would gain merit by observing secretly as many commandments of Judaism as he could. The rabbi gave a halakhic ruling that any Jew who had made a profession of Islam would thereafter commit an additional sin with each commandment of Judaism that he performed. Horrified by this ruling, Maimonides composed his *Epistle on Martyrdom* to refute it and to offer sounder advice to the forced converts. The epistle was probably written in 1165, shortly before Maimonides and his family left Fez.

I

A contemporary of mine[1] inquired regarding this persecution[2] in which he is forced to confess that that man[3] is God's messenger and that he is a true prophet. He addressed his query to one whom he calls a sage[4] and who was not touched by the tribulations of most of the Jewish communities in this violence, may it pass soon, and he wished to learn whether he should make the confession in order not to die, although his children will be lost among the gentiles, or should he die and not acknowledge what he demands, seeing that in this way he does what he is required by the Torah of Moses, and that the confession leads to the relinquishment of all the commandments.[5]

The man of whom the inquiry was made offered a weak and senseless reply, of foul content and form. He made statements in it distinctly harmful, as even light-minded women can realize.[6] Although his reply is weak, tedious, and confused, I thought I should quote him at length, but I spared the gift that God, blessed be He, bestowed on mankind. I mean speech, of which our sacred Torah states: *Who gives man speech? . . . Is it not I, the Lord?* [Exod. 4:11].[7] A man should be more sparing of his speech than of his money, and should not speak much yet do little. Indeed the Sage[8] has condemned verbosity with little content in his declaration: *Just as dreams come with much brooding, so does foolish utterance come with much speech* [Eccles. 5:2]. You know of course what Job's friends said as he talked on and on:[9] *Is a multitude of words unanswerable? Must a loquacious person be right?* [Job 11:2]; *Job does not speak with knowledge; his words lack understanding* [Job 34:35].[10] There are many such reflections.

Since I am well informed regarding this issue, and am not ignorant of it as this man is, I think it is proper to cite something of the gist of what he said, and omit the rest, which does not merit a response, although on close examination nothing of what he said deserves an answer. Such is his assertion that whoever acknowledges his[11] apos-

tleship has *ipso facto* disavowed the Lord, God of Israel. In support he brings the statement of our sages, "Whoever professes idolatry is as if he denied the entire Torah."[12] Judging from this analogy, he apparently finds no distinction between one who turns to idolatry not under duress but voluntarily, like Jeroboam and his associates,[13] and one who will under compulsion say of someone that he is a prophet, because he is afraid of the executioner's sword.

When I read this first statement of his, I decided not to challenge him before I read all of it, heeding the instruction of the Sage: *To answer a man before hearing him out is foolish and disgraceful* [Prov. 18:13]. So, when I looked further into his remarks, I noted that he said the following: "Whoever utters that confession is a gentile, though he fulfills the entire Law publicly and privately."[14] This "clear-headed man"[15] evidently sees absolutely no difference between one who does not observe the Sabbath out of the fear of the sword and one who does not observe it because he does not wish to.[16] I read on: "If one of the forced converts enters one of their houses of worship,[17] even if he does not say a word, and he then goes home and offers his prayers, this prayer is charged against him as an added sin and transgression." His proof text is the comment of our sages on the verse, *For My people have done a twofold wrong* [Jer. 2:13]:[18] They bowed to the idol and they bowed to the Temple.[19] This interpretation again does not discriminate between one who bowed to the idol and the Temple because he is a heretic and wants to defile God's name and desecrate His holiness and one who comes to a house of worship in order to behave like someone zealous[20] for the glory of God,[21] but does not utter or say a word that is in any way contrary to our religion, yet he must of necessity go to that house.[22] I likewise found him saying that anyone who avows that that man is a prophet,[23] though he does it under compulsion, is a wicked person, disqualified by Scripture from serving as a witness, since the Torah rules: *You shall not join hands with the guilty* [Exod. 23:1], that is, do not make a wicked man a witness.[24]

Even as I read his abuses, his long-winded foolish babbling and nonsense, I still believed it was not correct to challenge him before I read all the rest; perhaps it might be an example of what Solomon described: *The end of a matter is better than the beginning of it* [Eccles. 7:8].[25] But I found him saying toward the end of his missive that

heretics and Christians likewise assume that they will choose death rather than grant his apostleship.[26] When I learned this I was struck with amazement and wondered: Is there no God in Israel? [2 Kings 1:3, 6].[27] If an idol-worshiper burns his son and daughter to his object of worship,[28] do we even more certainly have to set fire to ourselves for service to God? Alas for the question, alas for the answer! Considering that he began by finding support in something irrelevant to his argument, and concluded by approving the thinking of heretics and Christians, I decided that God's judgment is right: his talk begins as silliness and ends as disastrous madness.

You ought to know that no one has the right to speak in public before he has rehearsed what he wants to say two, three, and four times, and learned it; then he may speak. This is what the rabbis taught, and took their proof text from the verse: *Then He saw it and gauged it; He measured it and probed it*. And afterward: *He said to man* [Job 28:27].[29] So much for what a person is required to do before he speaks. But if a man legislates on his own, and puts it down in writing, he should revise it a thousand times, if possible. This man, however, did nothing of the kind. He reduced all this important advice to writing, and did not think it necessary to prepare a first draft and then revise it. Evidently he considered his remarks free from doubt, in no need of correction. He handed them to someone who was to convey them in every city and town, and in this way brought darkness into the hearts of men. *He sent darkness; it was very dark* [Ps. 105:28].[30]

II

I shall now undertake to define the magnitude of the error that misled this poor wretch, and how he hurt himself unknowingly.[31] He thought he was doing one kind deed, but instead became guilty of many wrongs, marshalling much irrelevant evidence, spouting words, and becoming the slave of his pen. It is well known from the account of our rabbis that before the Israelites left Egypt, they corrupted their ways and violated the covenant of circumcision,[32] so that none of them save the tribe of Levi[33] was circumcised. Only when the Passover commandment was promulgated, in connection with which God instructed Moses: *No uncircumcised shall eat of it* [Exod. 12:43],[34] he ordered them to

perform the rite. Our rabbis described the performance: Moses did the cutting, Joshua the ripping, Aaron the sucking.[35] The foreskins were collected in heaps.[36] The blood of circumcision got mixed with the blood of the paschal lamb, and this made them deserving of the redemption.[37] This is the implication of God's narration through Ezekiel: *When I passed by you and saw you wallowing in your blood, I said to you: "Live by your blood," Yea, I said to you, "live by your blood"* [Ezek. 16:6].[38] Our rabbis added that they became degenerate with incest, deriving it from the the verse: *O mortal, once there were two women, daughters of one mother* [Ezek. 23:2].[39] Nevertheless, although they were corrupt as all this, God rebuked Moses for saying: *What if they do not believe me?* [Exod. 4.1].[40] And he retorted: They are believers, children of believers;[41] believers, as Scripture reports: *and the people . . . believed* [Exod. 14:31]; sons of believers: *because he believed, He reckoned it to his merit* [Gen. 15:6].[42] But you will end up not believing; it is told in Scripture: *Because you did not believe Me enough to affirm My sanctity* [Num. 20:12].[43] In fact, he was punished at once, as the rabbis understood:[44] "He who suspects the innocent suffers physically. What is the proof? Moses."[45]

Again, in Elijah's time, they were all sinfully deliberate idolaters, all but the *seven thousand—every knee that has not knelt to Baal and every mouth that has not kissed him* [1 Kings 19:18].[46] Notwithstanding, when he was about to hurl accusations against Israel at Mt. Horeb, the following dialogue was carried on between God and him. God: *Why are you here, Elijah?* Elijah: *I am moved by zeal for the Lord, the God of Hosts, for the Israelites have forsaken Your covenant*. God: Is it your covenant by chance? Elijah: *Torn down Your altars*. God: Your altars perhaps? Elijah: *And put Your prophets to the sword*. God: But you are alive!? Elijah: *I alone am left, and they are out to take my life* [1 Kings 19:10].[47] God: Instead of hurling accusations against Israel, would it not have been more reasonable to direct them against the gentile nations? They have maintained a house of prostitution, a house of idol worship, and you plead against Israel! For the text reads: *The towns of Aroer shall be deserted* [Isa. 17:2]. *Go back by the way you came, and on to the wilderness of Damascus* [1 Kings 19:15].[48] This is all explained by the sages in Midrash Ḥazita.[49]

Similarly in Isaiah's time, they indulged heavily in sin, as the text

accuses: *Ah, sinful nation! People laden with iniquity!* [Isa. 1:4];[50] they worshipped idols (*behind the door and doorpost you have directed your thoughts* [Isa. 57:8]);[51] they were also murderers (*Alas, she has become a harlot, the faithful city that was filled with justice, where righteousness dwelt—but now murderers* [Isa. 1:21]);[52] they even desecrated God's name (*Eat and drink, for tomorrow we die* [Isa. 22:13]);[53] and they disdained God's law (*Leave the way! Get off the path! Let us hear no more about the Holy One of Israel* [Isa. 30:11]).[54] Despite this, in punishment of his complaint: *And I live among a people of unclean lips*, immediately *one of the seraphs flew over to me with a live coal. . . . He touched it to my lips and declared: "Now that this has touched your lips, your guilt shall depart and your sin be purged away"* [Isa. 6:5–7].[55] According to the sages, his sin was not forgiven until Manasseh killed him.[56]

When the angel appeared[57] to plead against Joshua son of Jozadak because his sons married girls who were unworthy to be the wives of priests,[58] God silenced him, since the text continues: *The Lord rebuke you, O Accuser; may the Lord who has chosen Jerusalem rebuke you! For this is a brand plucked from the fire* [Zech. 3:2].

If this is the sort of punishment meted out to the pillars of the universe—Moses, Elijah, Isaiah, and the ministering angels[59]—because they briefly criticized the Jewish congregation, can one have an idea of the fate of the least among the worthless who let his tongue loose against Jewish communities of sages and their disciples, priests, and Levites, and called them sinners, evildoers, gentiles, disqualified to testify, heretics who deny the Lord God of Israel?[60] These are verbal quotations from his response; can you picture his punishment? They[61] did not rebel against God to seek satisfaction and delight, they did not abandon our faith to achieve status and worldly pleasures. *For they have fled before swords: before the whetted sword, before the bow that was drawn, before the stress of war* [Isa. 21:15].[62] This man did not realize that they are not rebels by choice. God will not abandon nor forsake them, *for He did not scorn, He did not spurn the plea of the lowly* [Ps. 22:25]. It is as the sages, peace be upon them, interpreted the verse, *And he smelled his clothes* [Gen. 27:27];[63] and pronounced it "his traitors" not "his clothes."[64] But this person wrote only what he invented and concocted.

It is common knowledge that in the course of a persecution during which Jewish sages were executed, Rabbi Meir was arrested.[65] Some who knew him said: "You are Meir, aren't you?" and he replied: "I am not."[66] Pointing to ham they ordered: "Eat this if you are not Jewish." He responded: "I shall readily eat it," and he pretended he was eating, but did not in fact. In the view of this modest person who knows the true meaning of Torah, Rabbi Meir is undoubtedly a gentile, for so his responsum rules: He who acts openly as a gentile, although secretly he behaves like a Jew, is a gentile, since according to him worship of God is open,[67] and he[68] hides it, as Rabbi Meir did.

It is likewise well known that Rabbi Eliezer was seized for heresy, which is worse than idolatry.[69] The heretics—may God destroy them—mock religion, and call anyone who adheres to it a fool, anyone who studies it deranged. They reject prophecy utterly. Rabbi Eliezer was a celebrated scholar in the sciences.[70] They inquired: "How can you be at your level in learning and still believe in religion?" He answered them in a way that made them believe that he adopted their doctrine, whereas in his reply he was really thinking of the true religion and no other. This incident is recounted in the midrash on Ecclesiastes[71] as follows: Rabbi Eliezer was seized in order to be converted to heresy. The chief brought him to the capital and said to him: "Say, old man, is a person like you engaged in this stuff?" He replied: "I have faith in the judge." The chief thought he meant him, whereas he was really thinking of God, and the chief continued:[72] "Rabbi, in view of your having faith in me, I was indeed wondering, can he possibly have been misled by such stuff? By God, you are free!" It is clear that Rabbi Eliezer feigned before the chief that he was a heretic, although he was sincerely devoted to God. Now heresy is far more grievous than idolatry; it has been clearly expounded in the entire Talmud.[73] Yet according to this virtuous individual, Rabbi Eliezer is definitely disqualified. But in this persecution to which we are subjected we do not pretend that we are idolaters, we only appear to believe what they assert.[74] They fully understand that we do not mean it at all, and are simply deceiving the ruler. *Yet they deceived Him with their speech, lied to Him with their words* [Ps. 78:36].[75]

We know what happened to Israel in the reign of the wicked Neb-

uchadnezzar, when all the inhabitants of Babylon, except Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah bowed before the molten image. The Lord, blessed be He, foretold it: *No more shall Jacob be shamed, no longer his face grow pale* [Isa. 29:22].[76] It may be that even the artisans and laborers[77] were among those who prostrated themselves in Babylon, if they were there at the time. Despite this, I have not come across anyone who named them wicked, gentiles, disqualified to give testimony. God did not charge them with the sin of idolatry, because they acted under duress. The sages put it this way, reflecting on the time of Haman: They only pretended, I also shall only pretend.[78] That man,[79] however, is undoubtedly God-fearing. *Shame on him who argues with his Maker, though naught but a potsherd of earth! Shall the clay say to the potter, "What are you doing?"* [Isa. 45:9].[80]

We likewise know of the evil, cruel decrees during the wicked rule of the Greeks,[81] including the order that none was to shut the door of his house, so he would not be alone, fulfilling a divine command. Nevertheless our sages did not label them gentiles, or sinful, but absolutely righteous. They prayed for them and added the thankful prayer—recited on Hanukkah—"for the Miracles,"[82] which one can read down to "and the wicked in the hands of the righteous."

If in my opening remarks I had not decisively stated that I would not repeat all of his prattle, I would let you read it *in extenso* how one can be fool enough to speak in this manner or let himself go and write or respond to irrelevant matter in answer to a simple question that was asked of him. He cited proof from "contradicted witnesses,"[83] one who reviles his father and mother,[84] the law of fringes,[85] one who plows with an ox and an ass together,[86] letting one's cattle mate with a different kind,[87] as if the man asked him to compose *azharot*,[88] in which all the precepts would be enumerated. He reported that the Muslims have an idol in Mecca and in other places; was he asked whether he should go on a pilgrimage to Mecca? He informed him that Muhammad[89] killed 24,000 Jews, as if he wished to know if Muhammad would share in the world-to-come, and many such unrelated items. He should have more properly paid much heed to Solomon's admonition: *Keep your mouth from being rash, and let not your throat be quick to bring forth speech before God* [Eccles. 5:1]. Had he heeded

this verse, he would have realized that whoever answered an inquiry or engaged in an analysis of the allowed and the forbidden was bringing forth speech before God, and he would not fail as he did.[90]

God knows and bears witness—"He is an adequate witness"[91]—that even if he rebuked and spoke more chattily than he did, it would not hurt me. I am certainly not seeking victory. On the contrary, I feel, *Let us lie down in our shame, let our disgrace cover us; for we have sinned against the Lord our God, we and our fathers* [Jer. 3:25].[92] I should have respected and esteemed him more, believed that his objective was to do God's bidding. Thank God, I know my personal worth very well. *We acknowledge our wickedness, O Lord—the iniquity of our fathers* [Jer. 14:20].[93] It would not have been right of me to find fault with him had he not written things that I have no right to overlook or disregard, like ruling that any victim of the persecution who prays receives no reward but is, on the contrary, guilty of committing a sin. I know that whatever is published in a book—correct or incorrect—will most certainly become public knowledge. This is why so many wrong ideas are popular among people. Only what is recorded in writing makes the difference between you and the wrong views,[94] and they will gain him a following. Therefore I was afraid that the response that turns people away from God would fall into the hands of an ignorant individual, and he would conclude that he will receive no reward for praying, so he will not pray. This, he will assume, is true of the other commandments; if he performs them, he will get no reward for performing any of them.

III

I shall now expose what this ranter of nonsense went astray in. It is explicitly reported in the Bible that Ahab son of Omri who denied God and worshiped idols, as God attests: *Indeed there never was anyone like Ahab* [1 Kings 21:25],[95] had the decree against him rescinded after he fasted two and a half hours.[96] The Bible informs us: *Then the word of the Lord came to Elijah the Tishbite: "Have you seen how Ahab has humbled himself before Me? Because He has humbled himself before Me, I will not bring the disaster in his lifetime; I will bring the disaster upon his house in his son's time* [I Kings 21:28–29].[97]

Eglon, king of Moab, who oppressed Israel, was handsomely rewarded by God because he honored Him and rose from his seat when Ehud said to him: *I have a message for you from God* [Judg. 3:20].[98] He had the throne of Solomon, which is a divine throne (*and Solomon sat on the divine throne* [1 Chron. 29:23]),[99] and the throne of the Messiah come from his descendants. For, as the rabbis teach us, Ruth the Moabite was his daughter.[100] God did not withhold his reward.

The wicked Nebuchadnezzar, who killed vast multitudes of Israel and burned the Temple that is the footstool of God,[101] was rewarded with a forty-year reign like King Solomon, because he ran a short distance to meet God for the sake of Hezekiah, as the rabbis state: "He ran after him a distance of four paces. God did not withhold his reward."[102]

Wicked Esau—God certified His rejection of him, as is written: *And I have rejected Esau* [Mal. 1:3]—had his outrages spelled out by the rabbis. That day he committed five crimes: murdered, worshiped idols, ravished an engaged girl, denied resurrection, and despised the rights of primogeniture. He then enwrapped himself in his cloak, came to his father Isaac, and asked him: "Father, is salt subject to the tithe?" His father reflected: "How strict my son is in religious observance."[103] Yet, as reward for the one commandment—honoring his father—which he fulfilled, God has granted him uninterrupted dominion until the Messiah the king arrives.[104] This is confirmed by the rabbis: David's descendant will not come before Esau receives his reward for honoring his father and mother, as the text reads: *He sent me after glory unto the nations* [Zech. 2:12].[105] Several times our sages repeat this principle: "The Holy One blessed be He, does not withhold the reward of any creature.[106] He always rewards everyone for the good deed that he performs, and punishes everyone for the evil he does, as long as he continues to do it."[107]

If these well-known heretics were generously rewarded for the little good that they did, is it conceivable that God will not reward the Jews, who despite the exigencies of the forced conversion perform commandments secretly? Can it be that He does not discriminate between one who performs a commandment and one who does not, between one who serves God and one who does not? So it appears from the writing of this man, nay, that when he prays he commits a sin, and he cites

the verse: *For My people have done a twofold wrong* [Jer. 2:13].[108] Now his error has been exposed to you and that he has not ceased to disparage his contemporaries, going so far as to speak against the sages, as we pointed out; nay, he even dared to ascribe to the Creator that He punishes for the performance of a commandment, as he expressed himself: The prayer of any of us is a sin. Indeed, it is of this that Solomon said: *And don't plead before the messenger that it was an error* [Eccles. 5:5].[109]

IV

Realizing this amazing matter that hurts the eyes, I undertook to gather pharmaceutics and roots from the books of the ancients, of which I intend to prepare medicine and salve helpful for this sickness, and heal it with the help of God.[110]

I think it right to divide what I have to say on this subject into five themes: 1. the class of the laws related to the time of forced conversion; 2. definitions of the desecration of God's name and the punishment; 3. the ranks of those who die a martyr's death, and those who are forcibly converted in a persecution; 4. how this persecution differs from others, and what is to be done in relation to it; and 5. a discussion of how advisable it is for one to be careful in this persecution, may God soon put an end to it. Amen.

Theme one, the distribution of the precepts during a time of duress, is divided into three classes: A. One class of precepts, those concerning idolatry, incest, and bloodshed, requires that whenever a person is forced to violate any of them, he is at all times, everywhere, and under all circumstances obliged to die rather than transgress. *At all times* means in a time of persecution or otherwise; *everywhere* means privately or publicly; *under all circumstances* means whether the tyrant intends to have him act against his faith or not; in these situations he is obliged to die rather than transgress.[111] B. All the other commandments, any of which an oppressor may compel him to transgress, he is to judge. If the tyrant does it for his personal satisfaction, be it a time of persecution or not, privately or publicly, he may violate the Torah and escape death.[112] Support of this procedure is found in the chapter on the wayward son:[113] "But the case of Esther was public!

Yes, but she was always passive."[114] Rava maintained: "If it is for his personal satisfaction it makes a difference; otherwise how do we allow ourselves to give them the censers and the coal-containers?"[115] Clearly, it is because it makes a difference when it is for their personal satisfaction. In the case of Esther the similar difference exists: It is for their personal satisfaction. Rava is following his own reasoning, for he rules that if a non-Jew orders a Jew to cut the alfalfa on a Sabbath day and throw it before his beasts or he will kill him, he is to cut it and not have himself killed. But if he orders him to cast it into the river, he is to prefer death to obeying him, since he wants him to commit a sin.[116] It is our principle to follow Rava's decision. It is clear that as long as the oppressor is doing it for his personal satisfaction he is to transgress and to shun death, even if it is in public and in the course of a persecution.[117] C. If it is the aim of the oppressor to have him transgress, it is for him to deliberate. If it is a time of persecution he is to surrender his life and not transgress, whether in private or in public, but if it is not, he should choose to transgress and not die if it is in private, and to die if it is in public.[118] This is how the sages formulate it: When R. Dimi arrived he ruled in the name of R. Johanan that even if it is not a time of persecution, he may transgress rather than die only in private; in public he may not violate even a minor rabbinic precept, even changing the manner of tying the shoes. In public is defined as a body of ten, all Israelites.[119]

The second theme covers the definitions of the profanation of God's name and the punishment. Profanation[120] divides in two classes, general and particular. The general has two subdivisions: Commission of a sin for spite, not for pleasure or any satisfaction to be derived from the act, but because one thinks little of it and scorns it. This individual has profaned God's name, for He warns: *You shall not swear falsely by My name, profaning the name of your God* [Lev. 19:12]; it is an act that yields no pleasure or satisfaction.[121] If he does it in public he is profaning God's name. It has been made clear that in public means before ten Israelites. The second subdivision is of people who are neglectful and do not improve their behavior, so that others grumble about them very critically.[122] They may not have committed a sin, but they have profaned God's name. In the matter of transgressions a person is required to be as heedful of human beings as he is of God.[123]

He, blessed be He, ruled: *You shall be guiltless before the Lord and before Israel* [Num. 32:22].[124] It is related in the tractate Yoma[125] that Rabbi Naḥman ben Yitzhak pointed to the proverb people use: "May God forgive so-and-so."[126] Another expression is: "When friends are embarrassed by his reputation."[127]

The particular is of two kinds. The first is when a learned person does something that others may do without demur, but that a person like him ought not to do, because he enjoys a widespread reputation of piety, so that more is expected of him. He has profaned God's name. Rav offered this definition of profanation: "When I, for example, buy meat and do not pay at once."[128] In other words, a person of his stature should not purchase anything unless he can pay at once at the time of purchase, although it is a quite acceptable practice (to buy on credit). A similar point of view is reflected in R. Johanan's statement: "When I, for example, walk four ells without wearing my phylacteries,"[129] implying that it is not proper for a man like him to do this. Many times we find the explanation that it is different when the party concerned is an important individual.[130]

The second kind is when a learned man behaves disgustingly in matters of trade or negotiation, receives people sullenly and insolently, is not of a friendly disposition, and has relations with others that are not founded on respect and mutual regard. A person of this character has profaned God's name. This is what the rabbis, peace be upon them, say: "When a person is learned but does not deal creditably, and does not speak softly to people, how is he judged? 'Woe to so-and-so who is educated, woe to his father who had him study, woe to his master who taught him. How perverse his actions are! How ugly his ways!' "[131] Scripture speaks of him in this passage: in that it was said of them, these are the people of the Lord and they left His land.[132]

If I were not concerned about verbosity and rambling, I would outline in detail how an individual ought to deal with others, what all his actions and words should be like, and how he should receive people, so that anyone who spoke to him or had dealings with him would have only words of praise. I would explain what the rabbis mean by their expression "dealing creditably" or "speaking softly to people." But this would require a full-length book. So I resume.

Sanctification of God's name is the contrary of profanation. When

a person fulfills one of the commandments, and no other motive impels him save his love of God and His service, he has publicly sanctified God's name.[133] So also if he enjoys a good reputation he has sanctified God's name. The rabbis phrase it this way: "When a person has studied Bible and Mishnah, ministered to scholars, dealt gently with people, what is the general judgment of him? Happy is his father who taught him Torah, and woe to those who have not studied. See how lovely are the ways of so-and-so who is learned in Torah, how proper his deeds."[134] It is he who is meant by the verse: *And He said to me, "You are My servant, Israel in whom I glory* [Isa. 49:3].[135] Similarly, if a great man shuns actions that others think ugly, even if he does not think so, he sanctifies God's name. Scripture counsels: *Put crooked speech away from you* [Prov. 4:24].[136]

Profanation of God's name is a grievous sin for which the inadvertent sinner and the deliberate sinner are equally punished. The rabbis rule that in the sin of the profanation of God's name it makes no difference whether it is accidental or purposeful.[137] A man is granted a delay in punishment of all sins, but not for the profanation of God's name. This is how the rabbis formulate it: "For the profanation of God's name no credit is extended. What does it mean? He is not treated as he is by the storekeeper who extends credit."[138] The rabbis also teach that whoever profanes God's name in secret is punished in the open.[139] It is a more serious sin than any other. Neither the Day of Atonement,[140] nor suffering, nor repentance procures forgiveness. This is the dictum of the rabbis: "He who is guilty of the profanation of God's name cannot find forgiveness by either repentance or the Day of Atonement, nor can suffering wash it away; they all suspend punishment until death provides the forgiveness, and its biblical support is: *Then the Lord of Hosts revealed Himself to my ears: 'This iniquity shall never be forgiven you until you die"* [Isa. 22:14].' "[141] The entire exposition is in reference to the person who voluntarily profanes God's name, as I shall elucidate.

As profanation of God's name is a grievous sin, so is sanctification of His name a most meritorious deed, for which one is generously rewarded. Every Jewish individual is required to sanctify God's name. It is stated in Sifra:[142] "I the Lord am your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, to give you the land of Canaan, to be your

God,"[143] that is, on condition that you sanctify My name publicly. In the chapter on the rebellious and defiant son we are told that Rabbi Ami was asked if a Noahide[144] is commanded to sanctify God's name. It may be concluded from this question that regarding an Israelite no similar doubt is raised; he is indeed bidden to sanctify His name, and this is what the verse implies: *That I may be sanctified in the midst of the Israelite people* [Lev. 22:32].[145]

Theme three is about the gradation of those who are martyrs for God's name and those whom persecution forces to convert. You have to realize that wherever the sages rule that one is to surrender his life and not transgress, one who was executed has sanctified God's name. If ten Israelites witnessed his death he has sanctified His name publicly. It includes Hananiah, Mishael, Azariah,[146] Daniel,[147] the ten martyrs by government order,[148] the seven children of Hannah,[149] and all the other victims of Israel, may God avenge their blood in the near future. It is to them that the verse refers: *Bring in My devotees, who made a covenant with Me over sacrifice* [Ps. 50:5].[150] To the rabbis this verse seemed appropriate: *I adjure you O maidens of Jerusalem, by gazelles or by hinds of the field* [Song of Songs 2:7],[151] which means—*I adjure you, O maidens of Jerusalem,* the persecuted generations; *by gazelles,* those who did for Me what I desired, so I did what they desired; *by hinds of the field,* those who shed their blood for Me[152] like the blood of the gazelles and the hinds.[153] To them this verse also refers: *It is for Your sake that we are slain all day long* [Ps. 44:23].[154]

A person to whom God grants the privilege of ascending to this high rank, in other words, to suffer a martyr's death, even if he is as sinful as Jeroboam ben Nebat and his associates,[155] is surely one of the members of the world-to-come, although he may not be learned.[156] The rabbis infer[157] this from the tradition that no creature is qualified to attain the status of the martyrs by government order: "Is it Rabbi Akiva and his colleagues? But of course not! They are beneficiaries of learning and good deeds.[158] No, it is the martyrs of Lydda."[159]

Now, if he did not surrender himself to death but transgressed under duress and did not die, he did not act properly, and under compulsion he profaned God's name. However, he is not to be punished by any of the seven means of retribution.[160] Not a single instance is found in

the Torah in which a forced individual is sentenced to any of the punishments, whether the transgression was light or grave. Only he who acts voluntarily is subject, as Scripture directs: *But the person . . . who acts defiantly . . . that soul shall be cut off* [Num. 15:30], but not of one who was forced.[161] The Talmud often says: The Torah rules that the forced individual is not culpable, *for this case is like that of a man attacking another and murdering him* [Deut. 22:26],[162] and frequently the ruling is repeated; a forced individual is excused by the Torah.[163] He is not dubbed a transgressor, nor a wicked man, nor is he disqualified from giving testimony, unless he committed a sin that disqualifies him from serving as a witness.[164] He simply did not fulfill the commandment of sanctifying God's name, but he can under no circumstance be named a deliberate profaner of God's name.[165]

Therefore, anyone who claims or thinks that a person who transgressed is to be condemned to death, because the sages established the principle that one must surrender himself to death and not transgress, is absolutely wrong. It simply is not so, as I shall explain. True, it is upon him to surrender to death, but if he does not he is not guilty.[166] Even if he worships idols under duress his soul will not be cut off, and he is certainly not executed by court order. This principle is clearly stated in the Sifra:[167] The divine Torah rules regarding one who gives of his seed to Molech: *I Myself will set My face against that man* [Lev. 20:5], not if he was forced, nor if it was unwittingly, nor if he was taught wrong. Plainly then, if he was forced or was taught wrong his soul will not be cut off, although it will be if he does it presumptuously and voluntarily. It is even plainer that if he forcibly committed sins that, if presumptuously and voluntarily committed, are punished by forty lashes, he is not at all subject to this punishment. The law against profanation is stated prohibitively in the declaration of God, blessed be He: *You shall not profane My holy name* [Lev. 22:32].[168]

Now it is known that a false oath is profanation, as we read in the Torah: *You shall not swear falsely by My name, profaning the name of your God: I am the Lord* [Lev. 19:12].[169] Yet the text of the Mishnah reads: "Men may vow to murderers, robbers, and tax-gatherers that what they have is heave-offering. . . ."[170] The school of Shammai qualifies that they may confirm this with a vow; the school of Hillel

broadens it to include even an oath. This is explicitly written. These matters are clear and in no need of supportive argument of any kind, for how can anyone suggest that the law with respect to a person who acted under duress and one who acted voluntarily is the same? And our sages ruled: "Let him transgress and surrender his life." So you see, this man[171] is of higher status than the sages, and more punctilious about the Law. By word of mouth and the use of his tongue, he surrenders himself to death and claims to have sanctified God's name. But by his actions he is a sinner and rebellious, and he makes himself guilty against his life, because God, exalted be He, established *by the pursuit of which man shall live* [Lev. 18:5], and not die.[172]

Theme four deals with the difference between this persecution and others, and what a person should do. Remember that in all the difficulties that occurred in the time of the sages, they were compelled to violate commandments and to perform sinful acts. The Talmud lists the prohibitions, that they may not study Torah, that they may not circumcise their sons,[173] and that they have intercourse with their wives when they are ritually unclean.[174] But in this persecution they are not required to do anything but say something, so that if a man wishes to fulfill the 613 commandments[175] secretly[176] he can do so. He incurs no blame for it, unless he set himself without compulsion to desecrate the Sabbath, although no one forced him.[177] This compulsion imposes no action, only speech. They[178] know very well that we do not mean what we say, and that what we say is only to escape the ruler's punishment and to satisfy him with this simple confession. Anyone who suffered martyrdom in order not to acknowledge the apostleship of "that man,"[179] the only thing that can be said of him is that he has done what is good and proper, and that God holds great reward in store for him. His position is very high, for he has given his life for the sanctity of God, be He exalted and blessed. But if anyone comes to ask me whether to surrender his life or acknowledge, I tell him to confess and not choose death. However, he should not continue to live in the domain of that ruler.[180] He should stay home and not go out, and if he is dependent on his work let him be the Jew in private. There has never yet been a persecution as remarkable as this one, where the only coercion is to say something. When our rabbis ruled that a person is to surrender himself to death and not transgress, it

does not seem likely that they had in mind speech that did not involve action. He is to suffer martyrdom only when it is demanded of him to perform a deed, or something that he is forbidden to do.[181]

A victim of this persecution should follow this counsel: Let him set it as his objective to observe as much of the Law as he can. If it happens that he has sinned much, or that he has desecrated the Sabbath, he should still not carry what it is not allowed to carry.[182] He must not think that what he has already violated is far more grievous than what he observes;[183] let him be as careful about observance as possible. Remember, a person must learn this fundamental principle. Jeroboam ben Nebat[184] is chastised for making the calves, and for disregarding the regulations regarding the Sabbath that come immediately after a holiday, or the like.[185] None can claim that he was guilty of a more serious sin.[186] This principle is applicable only in man-made laws in this world. God inflicts punishment for grievous sins and for minor ones, and He rewards people for everything they do. Hence it is important to bear in mind that one is punished for every sin committed and is rewarded for every precept fulfilled. Any other view of this is wrong.

What I counsel myself, and what I should like to suggest to all my friends and everyone that consults me, is to leave these places and go to where he can practice religion and fulfill the Law without compulsion or fear. Let him leave his family and his home and all he has, because the divine Law that He bequeathed to us is more valuable than the ephemeral, worthless incidentals that the intellectuals scorn; they are transient, whereas the fear of God is eternal.[187] Moreover, when two Jewish cities are at one's elbow, one superior to the other in its actions and behavior, more observant and more concerned with the precepts, the God-fearing individual is obliged to depart from the town where the actions are not at their best, and move to the better township.[188] We are guided by the admonition of the rabbis not to dwell in a city in which there are fewer than ten righteous residents.[189] They derive this from a dialogue between God and Abraham, which concludes the account of Sodom. *What if ten righteous people should be found there? And He answered: "I will not destroy, for the sake of the ten"* [Gen. 18:32]. This is the proper thing to do when both cities are Jewish. But if the place is gentile, the Jew who resides there must by all means

leave it and go to a more suitable location. He must make every effort to do so although he may expose himself to danger, so that he can get away from this bad spot where he cannot practice his religion properly, and strive to reach a comfortable place. Indeed, the prophets have spelled out that a person who resides among nonbelievers is one of them,[190] and so King David complained: *For they have driven me out today, so that I cannot have a share in the Lord's possession, but am told, "Go and worship other gods"* [1 Sam. 26:19]; he equated his dwelling among the gentiles with the worship of other gods. The pious and the God-fearing are required to despise evil and its doers, for so David declared: *O Lord, You know I hate those who hate You, and loathe Your adversaries* [Ps. 139:21].[191] He also announced: *I am a companion to all who fear You, to those who keep Your precepts* [Ps. 119:63].[192] Likewise, our father Abraham, we find, despised his family and his home and ran for his life to escape from the doctrines of the heretics.[193]

This is the effort he must make to separate himself from the heretics when they do not coerce him to do as they do; he should leave them. But if he is compelled to violate even one precept it is forbidden to stay there. He must leave everything he has, travel day and night until he finds a spot where he can practice his religion. The world is sufficiently large and extensive. The appeal of the person who pleads his duties to his family and his household is really no excuse. *A brother cannot redeem a man, or pay his ransom to God* [Ps. 49:8].[194] I do not think it is right to make this plea in order to avoid the obligation and not flee to a reasonable place. He must under no circumstance continue to reside in the land of persecution. If he does, he is a transgressor, profanes God's name, and is almost a presumptuous sinner.

Those who delude themselves to think that they will remain where they are until the king Messiah appears in the Maghreb, and they will then leave for Jerusalem[195]—I simply do not know how they will rid themselves of the present difficulties. They are transgressors, and they lead others to sin. The prophet Jeremiah's criticism: *They offer healing offhand for the wounds of My people, saying, "all is well, all is well," when nothing is well* [Jer. 6:14 and 8:11],[196] fits them and others like them very well. There is no set time for the arrival of the Messiah that they can count on and decide that it is close or distant. The incum-

bency of the commandments does not depend on the appearance of the Messiah. We are required to apply ourselves to study and to the fulfillment of the precepts, and we must strive for perfection in both. If we do what we have to, we or our children or grandchildren may be privileged by God to witness the coming of the Messiah, and life will be more pleasant. If he does not come we have not lost anything; on the contrary we have gained by doing what we had to do. But it is wicked and hopeless and a renunciation of the faith for anyone to stay on in these places and see the study of Torah cease, the Jewish population perishing after some time, he himself unable to live as a Jew, but continue to say: "I will stay here until the Messiah appears and then I shall be relieved of the situation I am in."

Theme five is concerned with how a person should regard himself in this persecution. Anyone who cannot leave because of his attachments, or because of the dangers of a sea voyage, and stays where he is,[197] must look upon himself as one who profanes God's name, not exactly willingly, but almost so.[198] At the same time he must bear in mind that if he fulfills a precept, God will reward him doubly, because he acted so for God only, and not to show off or be accepted as an observant individual.[199] The reward is much greater for a person who fulfills the Law and knows that if he is caught, he and all he has will perish. It is he who is meant in God's qualification: *If only you seek Him with all your heart and soul* [Deut. 4:29]. Nevertheless, no one should stop to plan to leave the provinces that God is wroth with, and to exert every effort to achieve it.[200]

It is not right to alienate, scorn, and hate people who desecrate the Sabbath. It is our duty to befriend them, and encourage them to fulfill the commandments. The rabbis regulate explicitly that when an evildoer who sinned by choice comes to the synagogue, he is to be welcomed and not insulted.[201] In this ruling they relied on Solomon's counsel: *A thief should not be despised for stealing to appease his hunger* [Prov. 6:30]. It means do not despise the evildoer in Israel when he comes secretly to "steal" some observance.

Ever since we were exiled from our land persecution is our unending lot,[202] because *from our youth it has grown with us like a father and from our mother's womb it has directed us* [Job 31:18].[203] But we frequently find in the Talmud, "a persecution is likely to pass."[204] May

God put an end to this one, and may the prediction be realized. *In those days and at that time—declares the Lord—the iniquity of Israel shall be sought, and there shall be none; the sins of Judah, and none shall be found; for I will pardon those I allow to survive* [Jer. 50:20]. May it be His will. Amen.

NOTES

1. Maimonides employs the first person plural in most references to himself (literally, ours). This was the usage developed among speakers of Arabic in medieval times, especially in northwestern Africa. In the translation, English practice is followed.

2. The reference is to the Almohads (al-Muwaḥḥidun) and their destructive conquest of North Africa and Spain (see Abraham ibn Ezra's poem: "Alas, calamity from heaven has struck Spain, an elegy for the victims of the persecution"). The Almohads (1130–1223) early in their history instituted forced conversion.

3. *That man* in this context is Muhammad, founder of Islam, whose name Maimonides avoids mentioning.

4. By qualifying the "sage" with "whom he calls," Maimonides indicates that he himself does not think so.

5. The question raised by the forced convert is either/or, as if there is no alternative, as Maimonides will point out.

6. It is to be noted that Maimonides begins with his opinion of the sage, and follows it with evidence that supports his judgment. His evaluation of women's capacity was common in the ancient and medieval world.

7. The verse from the Bible is used by Maimonides to support his thinking. This reflects the view, held by generations of rabbis and scholars, that Scripture is a storehouse of all knowledge and doctrine.

8. The reference is to King Solomon, recognized by tradition as the author of Song of Songs, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes.

9. Maimonides may be referring to Job's response to his friends after every speech they made, or he may be thinking of the length of Job's answers compared with the briefer statements of the friends.

10. The first passage is Zophar's opening rebuke and the second is by Elihu.

11. I.e., Muhammad.

12. BT Nedarim 28a; BT Kiddushin 40a; and elsewhere.

13. See the relevant account in 1 Kings 12:20ff.

14. The rabbi's reasoning is that the person who pronounces the Muslim confession of faith thereby reads himself out of the Jewish religious community, so that his fulfillment of the Law, or any part of it, is no more efficacious than its fulfillment by any Muslim or gentile.

15. An ironical characterization, implying the opposite.

16. Maimonides' judgment of the case is very different from that of the

rabbi. Maimonides regards the utterance of the confession as insignificant because it was not spoken in sincerity. The question to be determined is why an individual in this critical situation refrains from observing Jewish laws. Is it because he does not want to, or because he is afraid? Maimonides is persuaded that the judgment of the issue is related to this difference.

17. I.e., he attends Muslim services in a mosque.

18. In JT Sukkah 5, section 5, the verse is applied to those who bow before the sun and also bow down before the Temple.

19. I.e., they play the role of the truly pious Muslim.

20. A pious Jewish individual.

21. Literally: the magnificence of God, the name of the declaration that the Muslim makes: Allah Akbar—God is most magnificent.

22. Namely, the mosque.

23. I.e., Muhammad. The avowal is part of the confession that the convert to Islam recites.

24. This is the meaning that the rabbis derive from the verse. Cf. BT Bava Kamma 72b and BT Sanhedrin 27a.

25. Maimonides renders the verse "the end may be better."

26. The suggestion in the rabbi's introduction of "heretics and Christians" is that the confession is such grievous betrayal of their convictions, that a Jew should certainly act the same way, and if he fails to, he excludes himself from the Jewish religion.

27. The protest is made by Elijah against King Ahaziah's inquiry of a foreign deity. The phrase is expressive of Maimonides' inner pain.

28. The Torah, Lev. 20:1–6, very vigorously condemns this act and behavior of those who disregard this hideous deed.

29. The caution Maimonides expresses is consistent with his own practice, and he explicitly declares in his Introduction to the *Guide of the Perplexed:* "The diction of this treatise has not been chosen haphazardly, but with great exactness and exceeding precision . . . and nothing has been mentioned out of place." He reads the advice in Job as it was explained by R. Aha in Genesis Rabbah 24:5: God would repeat every statement He made to Moses. See also BT Eruvin 54b.

30. The verse speaks of the plague of darkness inflicted on Egypt. Former generations did not hesitate to use any apt biblical passage, even though its original use was in a different context.

31. Maimonides is referring to the sin that he committed by hurling insults at Jews and naming them gentiles.

32. Exodus Rabbah 1:10 charges the Jews in Egypt with deliberately discontinuing the rite of circumcision because they wished to imitate the Egyptians.

33. Exodus Rabbah 19:6.

34. The verse occurs in the section that teaches the proper treatment of the Paschal lamb.

35. Numbers Rabbah 11:6, in which Song of Songs 3:7 is said to be a summary of the story of the Exodus.

36. Josh. 5:3 reports that Joshua circumcised the people at the "Hill of

Foreskins." The corresponding Midrash accounts for its name by this explanation.

37. This is stated in Exodus Rabbah 19:6.

38. The Midrash supports its statement by this verse, as "your blood" is in the plural, to indicate its two sources.

39. Ezekiel relates in detail the sexual excesses in the northern and southern states of the land of Israel. Although his graphic description was meant to be taken metaphorically, the rabbis utilized it for their homiletic needs.

40. This is another illustration of the method of taking an apt phrase out of its context.

41. The dialogue comes from BT Shabbat 97a and Exodus Rabbah 3:12.

42. The verse is concerning Abraham who trusted God's promise that he was going to have offspring.

43. These words are directed to Moses and Aaron after they had struck the rock to draw water from it.

44. BT Shabbat 97a.

45. The author briefly gives the conclusion of the dialogue in the Talmud.

46. Maimonides' contention that the general worship of the Baal was voluntary is based on the lack of any reference to an outside force, unlike the situation in his day.

47. The verse is Elijah's reply to God's question: *Why are you here, Elijah?* And Elijah explains: *I am moved by zeal for the Lord, the God of Hosts, for the Israelites have forsaken Your covenant, torn down Your altars, and put Your prophets to the sword. I alone am left, and they are out to take my life.* The reported dialogue here is built on the phrases of the biblical verse.

48. The biblical verse is a continuation of the conversation between God and Elijah.

49. An alternate name for Song of Songs Rabbah, whose first word is *ḥazita* [Prov. 22:29]. The dialogue in our text is one of several in the Midrash that are meant to prove that God resents the slander of prophets against Israel.

50. This begins the first criticism of the people in the text.

51. The rendering of the verse by Maimonides is suggested by the Aramaic Targum to the verse.

52. The verse is from the elegy for the city of Jerusalem.

53. The wantonness voiced in the verse is a desecration of God's name since it indicates no realization of the seriousness of their position.

54. "The way" they reject is clearly God's way.

55. The verse is from the vision of the heavenly scene.

56. Both BT Yevamot 49b and JT Sanhedrin 28c (ed. Krotoshin) report it. In the former, Rava relates that a trial took place in which Menasseh accused Isaiah of acting against the laws of Moses.

57. Zech. 3:1 tells of a vision in which the prophet sees the high priest Joshua and Satan standing at his right to accuse him.

58. In Ezra 10:18 we read that some descendants of the sons of Joshua took non-Jewish wives. The Aramaic Targum to Zech. 3:3 informs us of this.

59. He probably has Satan in mind. In the incident with Joshua, Satan is

more an adversary than a ministering angel, but he is, of course, subject to God.

60. Maimonides enumerates these groups either because some from among them were forced to convert, or because by issuing his decision he is in fact disparaging scholars who think otherwise.

61. I.e., the forced converts.

62. The biblical quotation speaks of refugees who fled before the raiders, and there is a strong similarity to the situation in the text.

63. The quotation is from the story of the contest over the blessing of Isaac.

64. BT Sanhedrin 37a. R. Ze'eira suggests that since the consonants of *his clothes* (Gen. 27:27) are the same as of *his traitors*, the idea is implicit that even when Israelites act wrongfully against God, they are still under His protection. The verse continues: *and he blessed him*.

65. Stories of the Roman persecution of scholars, and the incidents connected with it, are found in BT Avodah Zarah 16b–18b, including the involvement of R. Meir. It is related that in his effort to free his wife from a house of prostitution to which she had been sentenced, he tried to bribe the guard. When the guard sounded his fear that he might be punished by his superiors, R. Meir told him that in that case he should call out: "O God of Meir, help me." Evidently this created the impression that R. Meir had his God, as they had theirs.

66. This exchange is not recorded in the Talmud.

67. The Hebrew text reads "secretly," but the rendering must be as translated here, for this is what Maimonides is seeking to establish.

68. I.e., the convert who addressed his question to the rabbi.

69. Although idolatry is thoroughly condemned in the Jewish tradition, it has at least the redeeming feature of belief in superior powers, whereas heresy is agnosticism, and often atheism, and a rejection of prophecy.

70. See S. Lieberman, *Greek in Jewish Palestine* (New York: Philipp Feldheim, 1965), pp. 15–19, where the examination of sources leads to the conclusion that R. Eliezer "acquired his secular learning in his youth," and was "even qualified to pass judgment on the style and exactness of Aquila's translation of the Torah into Greek."

71. To verse 1:8; it is the third midrashic development of the implications of the verse.

72. He is now addressing his associates, but the verdict is pronounced to R. Eliezer.

73. In the time of the tannaim, it generally referred to Christianity. In his comment on Mishnah Ḥullin 1:2 (ed. Kafiḥ) Maimonides identifies them with the Christians, but in his comment on Avot 1:3 he reports about the two disciples of Antigonos, Zadok and Boethus, and concludes: From that time, these cursed groups rose, the heretics, that are called Karaites in our district, I mean Egypt.

74. Later in this essay Maimonides teaches that in Islam monotheism is absolute, and he expresses a similar view in his responsum to the proselyte Obadiah. Cf. J. Blau, *Maimonides' Responsa* (1957–61), no. 448 (p. 725),

and A. Freimann, *Maimonides' Responsa* (1957–61), no. 369 (p. 335). Islam differs from Judaism with respect to the belief in the revelation to Muhammad, the man, and the Koran.

75. He implies that they lie when they also avow that Muhammad is the apostle of God.

76. The trial related in Daniel is fully developed by Maimonides in his *Sefer ha-Mitzvot*. (Hebrew translation and commentary by J. Kafiḥ [Jerusalem: Mossad Harav Kook, 1971] pp. 63–99). The enumeration of the 613 commandments, at precept 9, states: The Sanctification of God's Name, incumbent on all Israel, requires that we surrender ourselves to death by the hand of the tyrant for the sake of our love of Torah and our belief in His unity. This is what Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah did in the reign of Nebuchadnezzar, when he demanded that they bow to the image. All the people, including the Jews, obeyed him, and they brought great shame on Israel since the commandment that was designed for this kind of crisis was disregarded. The proper action was to publicize and demonstrate God's unity at that juncture. God has promised them through Isaiah that the shame of Israel would not be total, and that young men would arise in that difficult situation whom death would not daunt, and they would surrender their blood, and thus publicize the faith and sanctify God's Name in public as we were ordered by Moses.

77. Maimonides took these two groups, exiled by the Babylonians, 2 Kings 24:14, to be the great scholars, as the rabbis explained, BT Gittin 87a.

78. This explanation of the rabbis in connection with Nebuchadnezzar's decree is found in BT Megillah 12a.

79. He writes of the man who wrote that responsum.

80. Maimonides applies to the author of the responsum a verse in which the prophet reprimands those who criticize God for choosing the gentile Cyrus to proclaim the right of Israelites to return to their homeland.

81. The sources are listed in Moses Maimonides, *Epistle to Yemen*, ed. A. Halkin, trans. B. Cohen (New York: Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research, 1952), p. 22.

82. Throughout the holiday of Hanukkah a prayer of gratitude, recited during the services and in the grace after meals, begins: [We thank You] for the miracles,...

83. Deut. 19:15–21 states that if testimony given by witnesses is proved false by others, *you shall do to him as he schemed to do to his fellow* [Deut. 19:19]. In BT Makkot 2a–7a, the law as detailed in the Mishnah is further elaborated.

84. The root of the law is Exod. 21:17. It is one of the negative commandments (number 319 in Maimonides' list, ed. Kafiḥ, p. 329).

85. Num. 15:37–41 and Deut. 22:12. The rabbinic exposition is in chapter 4 of BT Menaḥot 38a–44a, b.

86. Deut. 22:10. Rashi's comment on the verse enumerates additional rabbinic prohibitions.

87. Lev. 19:19, which opens with the admonition: *You shall observe My*

laws. Rashi points out that these laws are God's command and are not rationally understandable.

88. *Azharot* are a literary genre of poetical enumerations of the 613 commandments developed by Jews in the Middle Ages. Several collections are known.

89. In the Hebrew text a derogatory epithet appears, and it is difficult to determine whether the author, translator, or copyist is responsible for it.

90. I.e., he would be conscious of the responsibility resting on him, and would be careful to write only what is relevant and to the point.

91. This is a frequent exclamation of Arabic literature.

92. The verse is taken out of context, but is appropriate here as an expression of Maimonides' embarrassment at the letter of the rabbi, whom he is excoriating.

93. Evidently the author seeks to take the edge off what sounds like boastfulness.

94. In his *Epistle to Yemen* (ed. Halkin, p. ix), he informs us of his realization that "the liar is as little restrained with his pen as with his tongue." Here he emphasizes the prestige that books enjoy, at times undeservedly.

95. The verse continues: *who committed himself to doing what was displeasing to the Lord, at the instigation of his wife Jezebel*. It is the concluding summary of the story of the vineyard of Naboth, which Ahab coveted, and Jezebel prevailed on him to set up a trump court, which condemned Naboth to death. Elijah pronounced the celebrated rebuke: *Would you murder and take possession?* [1 Kings 21:19].

96. Basing themselves on *Have you seen how Ahab has humbled himself before Me* [1 Kings 21:29], and on the practice of royalty to rise late, the rabbis, BT Ta'anit 25b, conclude that Ahab fasted from 9 A.M., but do not report how many hours he fasted.

97. JT Sanhedrin 10, Halakhah 2, tells that it lasted three hours. The number here may represent what Maimonides had in his copy of the Jerusalem Talmud.

98. It is the story of Ehud ben Gera who brought the tribute paid by Israel to Eglon, and then revealed he had a message for him from God. He rose and Ehud stabbed him fatally. See Judg. 3:15–22.

99. Maimonides cites this phrase to prove the truth of his statement.

100. BT Sanhedrin 105b says so, but in BT Nazir 23b the Tosafot speak of the genealogy ("his daughter or his son's daughter") as not exact, because of the several generations that elapsed between the time of Eglon, King of Moab, and the time of King David or Solomon.

101. See 2 Kings 25:9 and Isa. 66:1. Leviticus Rabbah 20:1 points out that like Solomon, the builder of the Temple who reigned forty years, the king of Babylonia who destroyed the Temple also reigned forty years.

102. BT Sanhedrin 96a. It cannot be told whether Maimonides drew his own conclusion or found in some source the relation between deed and reward.

103. The source of the catalog of sins is BT Bava Batra 16b, and in Tanḥuma to Gen. 27:1 (no. 8) is the halakhic question he asked of his father.

104. Cf. G. D. Cohen, "Esau as Symbol in Early Medieval Thought" in

Jewish Medieval and Renaissance Studies, ed. A. Altmann (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967), pp. 19–48.

105. In his comment on the verse Rashi cites an aggadic midrash that treats its content as the reward to Esau for honoring his father.

106. Cf. BT Pesaḥim 118a, Nazir 23b, Bava Kamma 38b, and Horayot 10b.

107. Maimonides voices his view here that every human act is judged, and that actions do not cancel one another; see his comment on the last Mishnah in Mishnah Avot, 4.

108. The rabbi thought the converts would be punished for a prescribed act as they would be for their conversion.

109. Maimonides regards the verse as very apt for the rabbi.

110. Maimonides here indulges in medical jargon, but the sense is clear.

111. The Hebrew formula is *yehareg ve-'al ya'avor*—let him get killed but let him not transgress, see BT Yoma 82a.

112. I.e., he is to submit to the force demanding the act.

113. BT Sanhedrin 74a–b, where the discussion is to be found.

114. In BT Sanhedrin 74a–b, where the definition of "public" is accepted as ten Jewish adults, the question is raised, why is Esther, who in public became the queen of Ahasuerus, not criticized; the answer given is that she did not actively participate, that she was passive.

115. During the Zoroastrian Sassanian rule in Persia (226–651 C.E.), the Persians provided fire and heat in their place of worship, and Jews had to participate along with the others. It was seemingly service to the idol worshiper, but the ruling authorities did not compel the Jews to cooperate out of malice, but for their own benefit.

116. This completes the passage from the Talmud.

117. This individual, when he realizes that the oppressor is not intent on converting him, is to yield to his demands under all circumstances and thus save his life.

118. Since he is not serving as an example to others, he may yield to the oppressor.

119. BT Sanhedrin 74a. In its text the rabbi who cites R. Johanan is Rabin.

120. The concept of profanation derives from a prohibition in the Torah: *You shall not profane My holy name* [Lev. 22:32 and elsewhere]. Like its opposite, *kiddush ha-Shem*, also deriving from the Torah, the concept was fashioned in rabbinic times.

121. As Maimonides explains, the juxtaposition of a false oath and desecration indicates that something done for no gain or pleasure to the doer is an act of profanation.

122. This category of people are within the law yet they do not act creditably. It is what Naḥmanides defines (in his comment on Lev. 19:2) as "a scoundrel within the requirements of the Torah."

123. It is the discussion of an act that is not sinful but may be regarded by others as sinful, or at least raise the suspicion that it is sinful.

124. Israel is mentioned together with God as requiring the guiltlessness of actions.

125. BT Yoma 86a. Several examples are given of this variety of desecration.

126. The saying prays that God will forgive such actions.

127. This definition of profanation was given by R. Yannai in BT Yoma 86a.

128. This and the rest of the material gathered here are collected in BT Yoma 86a.

129. This is one of the several statements in the Talmud by men who out of respect to the Almighty covered their heads. It was gradually popularized until it became the accepted practice of Orthodox Jews not to walk or sit with bare heads.

130. BT Berakhot 19a and elsewhere.

131. The same judgment is passed by Maimonides in *Mishneh Torah, Hilkhot Yesodei ha-Torah* 5:11.

132. The statement of the rabbis is in the same context, in BT Yoma 86a: see note 128.

133. The idea sounded here is also found in Maimonides' comment on Mishnah Makkot 3:17, in which he lays down the principles listed here.

134. This is from BT Yoma 86a.

135. In this particular prophecy the prophet speaks of God's choice of him (or the people) and of the praise bestowed.

136. The verse appears among counsels of caution.

137. BT Kiddushin 40a, in a discussion of the commission of sins and its negative consequences.

138. The assertion of the rabbis is likewise found in BT Kiddushin 40a. It is taken from Mishnah Avot 4:4, and reads not "extending credit," but "is punished."

139. This assertion is also in Mishnah Avot 4:4.

140. Maimonides begins with the inability to find forgiveness for this kind of profanation on the Day of Atonement because in Mishnah Yoma 8:8 we are told that sins of man against God are forgiven on the Day of Atonement. Its ineffectiveness in sins of profanation demonstrates the grievousness of such sins.

141. BT Yoma 86a. The verse from Isaiah is the last verse of the prophet's condemnation of Judah, during the preparations for defense against the Assyrian siege of Jerusalem. In the course of it the prophet protests: *But you gave no thought to Him who planned it, you took no note of Him who designed it long before* [Isa. 22:11]. This is profanation of God's name.

142. In its comment on Lev. 25:28. Its simple sense is that God's purpose in the Exodus was to give the Israelites the land of Canaan and to assert that He was their God. Maimonides explains it *on condition that* I be your God, and he finds support in the Sifra for his introduction of the condition; it contains the specific stipulation that He makes: on condition that you sacrifice yourselves in order to sanctify My name.

143. This is in chapter 8 of Mishnah Sanhedrin.

144. Jewish tradition teaches that the descendants of Noah, in other words, all of humankind with the exception of the Israelites, are obliged to observe seven commandments. The Noahide laws prohibit the rabbinic expansion of the law, blasphemy of God, idolatry, incest, bloodshed, robbery, and cutting off a part from a living animal. The problem of whether Noahides are also required to sanctify God's name and are forbidden to profane it is discussed in BT Sanhedrin 74a. It is first suggested that if they are, the total will be eight, but that objection is obviated by explaining that essentially all seven are for the purpose of sanctification.

145. BT Sanhedrin 74b invokes this verse as evidence that ten Israelites are needed to make an act public. Maimonides emphasizes that this indicated the duty of Israelites to sanctify God's name.

146. Exiles from the land of Israel, they are the heroes of Daniel 3, which recounts the order of Nebuchadnezzar to his people to prostrate themselves before an image, the refusal of the three to obey, and their miraculous escape from the fire in the furnace.

147. Daniel, after whom the book is named, succeeded in interpreting the mystifying dreams of Nebuchadnezzar and the mysterious writing on the wall that Belshazzar beheld; he survived a night in the den with the lions and saw visions that predicted the future fate of the people of Israel.

148. Although the story of the ten rabbis executed by the Roman administration is widely accepted, the earliest source is a late midrash, *Eleh Ezkerah* in A. Jellinek's edition of small midrashim, *Bet ha-Midrash* (Leipzig, 1853; reprint ed., Jerusalem: Wahrmann, 1967), 2:62–74. For an analysis of the material, see L. Finkelstein, "The Ten Martyrs," in *Essays and Studies in Memory of Linda R. Miller*, ed. I. Davidson (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1938), pp. 29–55.

149. The seven children of Hannah (for the variations in the mother's name and story, see G. D. Cohen, "The Story of Hannah and Her Seven Sons in Hebrew Literature," in *Mordecai M. Kaplan Jubilee Volume*, ed. M. Davis [New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1953], pp. 109–22, Hebrew), all refused to worship idols during the persecution of Antiochus IV (168 B.C.E.). They wouldn't even pick up a ring that the king dropped and they were all executed. See 2 Macc. 7.

150. The application of this verse to these martyrs is made in BT Sanhedrin 110b.

151. This verse is repeated three times (with variations) in Song of Songs.

152. Song of Songs Rabbah to 2:5. The explanation offered here is one of several in the Midrash. "What they desired" is explained as what I decided for them.

153. The phrase is from Deut. 15:22–23.

154. The exposition is developed in BT Pesaḥim 50a.

155. See 1 Kings 12:20 ff. He is notorious as the man "who sinned and he led the many to sin," Mishnah Avot 5:18.

156. Although the unlearned person is not esteemed, as many declarations in the Talmud express it, especially BT Pesaḥim 49a–b.

157. BT Pesaḥim 50a and BT Bava Batra 10b.

158. In BT Bava Batra 10b a phrase is added: "without these as well," i.e., even if they were not martyrs they would be in Heaven.

159. See S. Lieberman "The Martyrs of Caesarea" in *Annuaire de l'Institut de Philologie et d'Histoire Orientales et Slaves* 7 (1939), and in a revised Hebrew translation, *Salo Wittmayer Baron Jubilee Volume on the Occasion of His Eightieth Birthday*, ed. S. Lieberman and A. Hyman (Jerusalem: American Academy for Jewish Research, 1974), pp. 213–46.

160. According to the rabbis, four of the seven punishments are public executions (by sword, stoning, strangulation, and burning), and the others are premature death, divinely caused death, and lashes.

161. The deduction is made by Maimonides.

162. BT Nedarim 27a. From the verse cited in the text, *Sifrei* ad versum states "that all people described in the sources as forced are guiltless, and their lives are to be spared."

163. Deut. 22:26, cited several times in both the Babylonian and Jerusalem Talmuds, is explained to teach us that the attacker, like the girl, is not, so far as possible, killed, and that the girl, like the attacker, is subject to the principle of "let him surrender his life and not transgress." See BT Pesaḥim 25b.

164. BT Bava Kamma 28b, Avodah Zarah 54a.

165. In *MT Hilkhot Edut* 10, Maimonides discusses at length the people disqualified to testify because they violate Mosaic or rabbinic laws.

166. Maimonides does not exonerate the person from the guilt of profanation because in acknowledging Islam that person has acted against God's sanctity. However, Maimonides discriminates between him, a forced convert, and the deliberate sinner.

167. Sifra, Lev. 10, in the section dealing with people who dedicate their offspring to Molech.

168. Rashi explains the verse as follows: by transgressing presumptuously.

169. The second half of the verse is the result of the first.

170. Mishnah Nedarim 3:4. In his comment on this mishnah, Maimonides states explicitly that they are oppressors. In the case of the tax-gatherer he specifies that if he is a legal emissary of the government no attempt to shirk is allowed.

171. The rabbi who wrote the response to the convert.

172. This conclusion was added by the rabbis, cf. BT Sanhedrin 74a. Lev. 18:5 begins: *You shall keep My laws and My rules*.

173. This text is a conflate of the versions in BT Rosh ha-Shanah 19a and Ta'anit 18a and Me'ilah 17a.

174. Maimonides also speaks of these prohibitions in the *Epistle to Yemen*.

175. Based on a statement in BT Makkot 23b, the belief that there are 613 commandments (248 positive and 365 prohibitory) was universally accepted in the Jewish world.

176. Despite his insistence that these converts can continue to live as Jews, he is cautious enough to advise secrecy because the government authorities will not tolerate public behavior as Jews.

177. Maimonides here grants the individual the right to save his life, but in *MT Hilkot Yesodei ha-Torah* 5:7 he rules that one who chooses martyrdom is actually committing a sin.

178. The Moslems and their rulers.

179. Muhammad.

180. Cf. the *Epistle to Yemen,* where Maimonides urges a similar course. It may be suggested that his own departure from Spain, and later from Fez, resulted from a fear that he was in danger of being recognized as a Jew.

181. This includes the positive as well as the prohibitory laws.

182. In Mishnah Shabbat and BT Shabbat many laws and discussions are found that have to do with the general principle that it is forbidden to move things from the home to a public area and conversely.

183. It is the principle that when a person is guilty of a grievous sin or crime and incurs severe punishment, he must not be chastised for a minor offense and its lighter retribution, cf. BT Gittin 53bf.

184. Cf. 1 Kings 12:28–33.

185. It is the practice instituted by the rabbis of preparing a dish on the day before the holiday, which will be consumed on the Sabbath immediately following, and by means of it the dishes prepared for the Sabbath on the holiday (Friday) are regarded as a continuation of the cooking begun on the day before the holiday (Thursday). This is called the "fusion of cooked dishes." They have similarly provided for a "fusion of areas," which can be set up so as to extend the stretch within which carrying on the Sabbath becomes permissible.

186. So that the rule mentioned in note 183 would be in force, Maimonides limits its effectiveness only to man-made laws; God is not bound by them.

187. Maimonides knows very well that in the evaluation of the goods of this world a difference exists between the common folk and the intellectuals. His analysis is contained in the last chapter of his *Guide of the Perplexed.*

188. See Maimonides' Introduction, called "Eight Chapters," to the commentary on Mishnah Avot, chapter 4, which deals with the choices that confront a person.

189. Maimonides probably relied on the admonition of *Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer,* chapter 26.

190. The rabbinic judgment that whoever dwells outside the land of Israel is like one who has no God (BT Ketubbot 110b), is the source of Maimonides' statement.

191. In *Avot de-Rabbi Natan* (ed. S. Schecter [Vienna: 1887], p. 64, version A) the force of the expression is mitigated and limited to converts and Christians.

192. See Tanḥuma, Tzav, 8, discussing some of the ancients whom God chose but who did not draw close to Him (in reference to Ps. 65:5: *Happy is the man You choose and bring near*), and they made the effort to draw close. One of them was David, and the verse indicates that he strove to come close to God.

193. See *Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer,* 26.

194. Sifrei Deut. to verse 32:39 derives from this sentence that parents cannot save children nor can brothers save one another from the consequence of their deeds.

195. In the *Epistle to Yemen,* Maimonides derives from a biblical verse that the Messiah will appear in the land of Israel.

196. Jeremiah attacks the profiteers and false prophets who mislead the people with promises of peace and prosperity.

197. Maimonides is well aware of the obstacles in the way of rational conclusions and truly important decisions.

198. In *MT Hilkhot Yesodei ha-Torah* 5:9, he seems to take a harsher position, identifying the individual who is reluctant to leave as *a dog* [*that*] *returns to his vomit* (Prov. 26:1), and names him a "deliberate idolator."

199. The assurance given the observant convert and Jew finds its parallel in the position of R. Judah Halevi (c. 1075–1141) who, although he deplores the choice of Jews to live away from the land of Israel, contends that the fulfillment of God's laws in exile earns double reward, *Kuzari* 1:114.

200. Maimonides does not concede the right to transgress and make peace with the idea of continuing to live in "the provinces that God is wroth with."

201. See *Tosefta* (ed. Zuckermandel), BT Bava Kamma 7:3.

202. In the *Epistle to Yemen,* Maimonides dates the opposition to Judaism and its followers from the time of the Revelation at Mt. Sinai.

203. Maimonides takes the verse, Job 31:19, from the personal confession of Job to refer to the people of Israel and their history.

204. BT Ketubbot 3b; see *Epistle to Yemen.*